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TAGS: PREL PHUM SU AG

SUBJECT: ALGERIA UNYIELDING ON HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL AND DARFUR

REF: DRL-EMBASSY JANUARY 12 AND JANUARY 15 E-MAILS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) A top Algerian MFA official was adamant that the Human Rights Council (HRC) should send a mission composed of ambassadors to study the situation in Darfur during his January 15 meeting with Ambassador. Ambassador reviewed with MFA Director General for International Organizations Bouguerra the key tracks of U.S. policy on Sudan: the phased transition to UN peacekeepers; a political agreement among Sudanese political groups; and amelioration of the humanitarian crisis affecting 2.8 million people. Bouguerra responded that Algeria agreed on these goals and on the need for positive developments to build on the progress to date in addressing the Darfur situation. Asked if our policies were aimed in the same direction, Bouguerra said "absolutely" and underscored the need for the international community to safeguard progress in Darfur and act in concert on the steps ahead. Noting the wide disparity in figures on the toll of human suffering in Darfur, Bouguerra also asked Ambassador to share U.S. information on the scope of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur for GOA review.

ALGERIA OBLIGED TO SUPPORT AFRICAN GROUP CONSENSUS

¶2. (C) Turning to discussions at the HRC in Geneva on Darfur, Ambassador reviewed the American goal that a team sent to gather information and assess the situation in Darfur be composed of technical experts. Bouguerra replied that, for Algeria, acknowledging that a mission from the HRC should be sent is itself a huge gain. Ambassador cautioned that a badly made up mission that was politicized would set a bad precedent. Bouguerra vehemently disagreed: the Africa Group in the HRC preferred, he claimed, that the group send ambassadors from the regional groups. He explained that the Sudanese government would not accept technical experts; it doubted their neutrality. The Africa Group, he claimed, supported the Sudanese stand so that it could at least have a mission sent to Darfur. Ambassador noted that some African governments had told us they opposed sending ambassadors. Bouguerra acknowledged that not all Africa Group members shared the consensus view, but since this approach had the broadest support, Algerian Geneva Permrep Jazairy had to back it.

¶3. (C) Ambassador asked Bouguerra to clarify if Jazairy's pronouncements in Geneva were based on instructions from Algiers or his need to espouse the Africa Group's position. Bouguerra responded that Jazairy's statements in the HRC reflected Algiers' instructions. Ambassador asked why the Africa Group rejected the sending of experts in favor of sitting ambassadors. Bouguerra said he could not say but that Algeria could also ask the U.S. why it opposed the sending of experts to Palestine. He added that Algeria could not ignore the Sudanese position as if there was no problem with the Western Group resistance to sending a mission to

Iraq. Ambassador emphasized the Darfur and Palestinian issues should not be linked. Bouguerra agreed that there was no linkage between Palestine and Darfur in Algerian policy, but said Algeria wants a consistent HRC policy. Bouguerra reiterated that the Africa Group's consensus view was that a mission composed of technical experts would not preserve the achievements to date in Sudan.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) The German ambassador, accompanied by his Portuguese counterpart, made the same presentation to Bouguerra on January 14 and got the same response. The Algerians generally are loath to break Arab League ranks. The best way to moderate their stance is for countries in the Africa Group at the HRC to underline to the GOA that Algeria is hurting its own credibility within the Group due to its stand on issues such as this one on Darfur. (None of four sub-Saharan ambassadors in Algiers with whom the Ambassador talked the evening of January 15 supported Algeria's stance on Darfur's human rights situation.) Given the vehemence with which Bouguerra defended the Algerian posturing in Geneva, we suspect the Algerian permrep has clearance for his hard line there. We therefore also recommend that a senior official in Washington reiterate our concerns about Algeria and the HRC with the Algerian ambassador in Washington, who remains well-connected high up in the Algiers foreign policy bureaucracy. We also ought to share what we can about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur with the GOA here in Algiers; we cannot depend on their mission in Geneva forwarding materials.

FORD